

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Music in the Air-Ziegfeld, 10/8/51. Reginald Hammerstein presents revival of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein second musical hit. Dennis King, Jane Pickens, Charles Winninger, Conrad Nagel are starred, Hammerstein directed...Glad Tidings-Lyceum, 10/11/51. Harold Bromley presents a new romantic comedy by Edward Mabley. Melvyn Douglas, Signe Hasso and Haila Stoddard are featured. Mr. Douglas directed.

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Lace On Her Petticoat-Booth, 9/4/51. Two weekly reviewers split on merits of Aimee Stuart's new play presented by Herman Shumlin. Shipley, New Leader, termed it an engaging, tender comedy that challenges thought. Minor criticism is that joys of youngster don't seem important enough. With exception of high pitched Patsy Bruder, the cast is excellent. Clurman, New Republic, blamed unfortunate rigidity and stress of direction by Shumlin for making play strained and strenuous.

Diamond Lil'-Broadway, 9/14/51. Trade paper reviewers hint that Mae West's vehicle may be on its last road tour or so. Hobe, Variety, filed outright pan, listing evening as a "toughie." Mae has gotten no younger, slimmer or subtle, Hobe reminds. While Francis, Billboard, and George Jean Nathan remain loyal fans, George Brandt production and supporting cast were praised, but Mae remains the whole show. Added attraction of one million dollars worth of jewels didn't impress critics much.

Out West of Eighth-Barrymore, 9/20/51-9/22/51. Weekly critics had even fewer kind words for Burr and Pearson production of Kenyon Nicholson comedy than did their daily colleagues. After praising Barbara Baxley, Irene Cowan and the rest of the valiant cast, they resorted to praising the Ralph Alswang scenery and the Jocelyn costumes. Trade paper critics just marked it off as hopeless. Kerr, Commonweal, noted good sense of Burgess Meredith to leave his name off as director. Why the show, which cost \$65,000, should have been permitted to open at all is a perplexing theatrical mystery, said Kerr. Gabriel, Cue, classed humor as "mule-ornery."

Out of Town Reviews

Proper tightening and editing will turn Faithfully Yours into a Broadway hit, predict two New Haven trade critics. The Richard W. Krakeur production of the new comedy by L. Bush Fekete and Mary Helen Fay based on a play by Jean Bernard-Lac was greeted by Bone, Variety, and Golly, Billboard. Cast, headed by Ann Sothern, Robert Cummings and Glenn Anders was termed perfect, staging by Richard Whorf, at the Coronet, opens October 18th.

News & Notes

Gilbert Gabriel, Cue, elected N.Y. Drama Critics Circle president at fall meeting. Joseph T. Shipley, New Leader, named vice president. Retained in office is George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, as secretary and Thomas H. Wenning, Newsweek, as treasurer...Howard Barnes, writing single article for "The Reporter" not covering first nights, corrects Variety...October "Harper's" features article by John Houseman entitled "The Critics in the Aisle Seats"...Officers of League of N.Y. Theatres were reelected...Shows that closed include Twilight Walk... "Drama Desk" holds first meeting October 15th at Rosoff's with Robert Whitehead as guest...Love and Let Love will play four weeks in Chicago after Boston stand.

 ' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

1. NY Times	12. Chr. Science Monitor	23. This Is N.Y.
2. NY Herald Tribune	13. Journal of Commerce	24. Commonwealth
3. NY News	14. Morning Telegraph	25. Cue
4. NY Mirror	15. Ward Morehouse	26. Nation
5. NY Compass	16. George Jean Nathan	27. New Leader
6. NY Post	17. Wall Street Journal	28. New Republic
7. NY Journal American	18. Women's Wear	29. Newsweek
8. NY World Tele-Sun	19. Billboard	30. New Yorker
9. Brooklyn Eagle	20. Variety	31. Park East
10. LI Press	21. Critical Digest	32. Saturday Review
11. Newark News	22. Theatre Arts	33. Time

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

- Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-24-28-29-32.
- None: 10-14-21-23-25-26-27-31.
- Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-28.
- None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-27-29-30-31-32-33.
- Con: 1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-21-25-28-30.
- None: 12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-26-27-29-31-32-33.
- Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3.
- None: 10-14-21-23-31.
- "All the critics for Mae, per usual, but against her play."
- Con: 26. None: 10-21-23-31.
- Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-24-25-28-30-33.
- None: 12-14-22-23-29-31-32.
- Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-23-24-31.
- Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-23-26-31-32.
- Con: 4-6-7-12-16-22-32-33. None: 10-17-21-23-24-27
- Con: 2-4-7-26-29-30-33. -31.
- None: 10-21-22-23-27-28-31-32.
- Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-23-24-26-27-
- Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 4. 28-31.
- None: 10-21-22-23-31.
- Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33.
- None: 10-15-21-22-23-31.
- Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-23-27-28-31-32.

BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51

BORSCHT CAPADES-9/17/51

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

DIAMOND LIL'-9/14/51

GUYS AND OLLS-11/24/50

LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/4/51

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51

SEVENTEEN-6/22/51

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

STALAG 17-5/8/51

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

 ' Book Notes '

Lawrence Langer's autobiography due from Dutton in November is called "The Magic Curtain"...Tallulah Bankhead's autobiography will be called "Ah, My Foes and Oh, My Friends"...Paul Denis named book reviewer for "N.Y. Review"...Jimmy Durante will talk at Herald Tribune "Book & Author" luncheon October 16th at Hotel Astor in part of promotion for Gene Fowler's "Schnozzola"...Abel Green, Variety, sold his "Outbound and Gagged" to Doubleday...Variety notes that P.M. Stone, 12 Lexington Terrace, Waltham, Mass., is seeking material on Castle Square Theatre, Boston..."A Song in His Heart" by Johnny Jay Daly recommended by Sheaffer, Eagle, as fascinating biography of minstrel song composer James A. Bland...George Jean Nathan's "Theatre Book of the Year 1950-1951" published by Knopf praised by Hobe, Variety, and Gardland, Journal American. Latter disagreed with some of Nathan's "best" choices...Al Hirschfeld's "Show Business is No Business" published by Simon & Schuster won critical applause of Watts, Post, Pollock, Compass, Sheaffer, Eagle, and Brown, SRL.

' Green Room Department '

ROLE OF CRITIC...The critic's function is to be interesting on the subject under discussion, defines Clurman, New Republic. He should not try to be a guide for practical theatre going, because such a role is far too personal to be entrusted to a stranger. On principle he is for people going to the theatre, and if possible having a good time there, regardless of anyone's critical evaluation.

"NOON" DISPUTE...Terming the disagreement between Arthur Koestler and Sidney Kingsley over foreign presentation plans for Darkness At Noon a childish affair at best, Billboard editorial hopes the dispute will be settled amicably and without arbitration. The play does an important service to America just by being on the boards.

COLUMN TIPS...Play of the Month Club and Play of the Month Guild warring over titles, reports Winchell...Mat West may appear in a play about Carrie Nation, says Walker...Theatres considering charging 25 cents for mail order service hears Kilgallen.

MORE L.A. TO N.Y...West Coast actors wanting to discover if they can remember more than 10 lines at once are one reason for seeming Hollywood invasion of N.Y., analyzes Hawkins, WT&S. TV is an invitation and a challenge to the motion picture actor that is basically responsible for the trend. But the critic feels the motion picture actors are wrong in sensing any resentment toward them by the Broadway regulars.

PRODUCERS PROBLEMS...Kenyon Nicholson, author of short-lived Out West of Eighth, filed copy of note he sent to his producers before opening night with the drama editors. In it he wished that for benefit of all concerned the comedy could close down before opening night. Coleman, Mirror, believes it might have fared better if given an out of town tune-up...Investors will be happy to learn that in present age of quick flop and smash hit, that the net profit of a hit runs three times the profits of a success decades ago, states Morehouse, WT&S. Runs over 1000 performances are expected of hits today.

SCANDINAVIAN FANS...Theatre fans in Sweden and Finland create a huge demand for plays and players, wires Rice, Post. "At liberty" actors in N.Y. would be wise to brush up on their Swedish and head for Stockholm where most actors are fully employed 12 months a year. In Finland there is such a demand for plays, that Rice suggests U.S., as a gesture of true good will, send over American plays royalty free. In both countries people of all ages attend the theatre regularly.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

Remains To Be Seen-Moresco, 11/3/51. Majority of first night appraisers mildly hailed Leland Hayward's production of Lindsay and Creuse mystery comedy as first good theatre of the season. Though most admitted play didn't become really interesting until after the first act curtain. Dissenters included Atkinson, Times; Garland, Journal American; and Dash, Women's Wear. Top honors went to Janis Paige, new to the stage but not to show business. Most billed her as a coming theatre star. Jackie Cooper also received favorable mentions. Co-author Lindsay was complimented for his portrayal by all but McCord, Herald Tribune. Atkinson thought Lindsay was the only worth while item in the production, labeling the rest as tasteless, labored and poorly done. Garland liked everything but the script. While Dash didn't find it suspenseful or mirthful. He did agree with those who thought it might build into a popular success. Critics voiced split decision over staging efforts by Bretaigne Windust. Hawkins, WT&S, and Coleman, Mirror, raved about all elements, while remainder of notices must be classified as lukewarm. Curtain calls received plaudits.

' Meet the Critic-Robert Coleman '

Drama reviewers who pretend they are "critics" are being pretentious, Robert Coleman told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. He views his own post on the New York Mirror as that of drama reporter whose main function is to report accurately on the productions he views. By inference he tells if he thinks the show is worth the price of the ticket. The public and producers, by necessity, have come to look upon the drama reporter as a literate shopper.

True critics, he believes, fall into two distinct classes. The first is composed of the critic who understands his own art to such a degree that he can set new and higher standards. Aristotle is the prime example of this class. The second and larger group is composed of the creative writer who uses criticism as a springboard for his own talent and thoughts. Beerbohm, Hunt, Hazlitt and Shaw are apt examples of this class. Though no present day reviewer falls into either, they do en masse set new and higher standards for the theatre arts. A minor role of the drama reviewer is to stimulate interest in the theatre. He is failing in his function, Coleman explained, if he fails to make the theatre as exciting and glamorous as he can.

The Mirror reviewer looks upon ANTA as a pompous, pretentious bore. The federal government had no right to grant a charter to a private group of individuals. But once having done this, everyone in the theatre should be given equal representation. Actually they shouldn't pose as an official national theatre. Last year's program was not justified at the prices charged. Such a group, if given a more democratic base, might do something useful if they joined forces with the New Dramatist Committee and Equity Library Theatre to present new plays by new writers.

TV will never compete with the theatre for business, Coleman predicted. The reason is simply that the vast majority of TV fans would never have bought a theatre ticket in the first place. TV is valuable in that it provides an income for theatre people between shows. In the dance field Coleman sees some fine young dance directors being trained. James Starbuck of NBC "Your Show of Shows" is doing fine work, he pointed out.

On the subject of awards, Coleman wishes there were more. Each is a tribute of affection on those being bestowed. He is in favor of anything that is done to encourage theatre going. Women's clubs, he reminded, actually do a good job of encouraging theatre. Not only do they buy many seats and give awards, but they aid many actors' charities by gifts. Good taste is inherent in the giving of most awards.

Coleman, who started on the N.Y. Mirror as drama editor and critic in 1924, is the dean of the daily N.Y. critics in point of service. His interest in the theatre developed while attending Columbia University. The reviewer's father, a railroad magnate, sent him to N.Y. to get a degree. But after a brief taste of N.Y. and the theatre, Coleman decided that was the career for him. His first reporting job was with the Morning Telegraph where he was assistant drama editor and critic. From there he switched to the Mirror.

' Legit Stuff '

Old Vic invited ANTA to send group to play in London next summer...Johnnie's Ticket Office and Embassy Theatre Ticket Service have had licenses revoked...Council of Living Theatre to hold meeting soon...ANTA will benefit from preview opening of Empire Room of Waldorf Astoria...Charles Warburton elected president of Shakespeare Club of New York...Series of "Sunday Theatre" performances will start in Sutton Hotel October 14 starting with The Daughters of the Late Colonel...Eight hundred attended Equity's first meeting of the season...New Parsons Theatre, Hartford, opens November 1st with Giroia Swanson and David Niven in Nina.

